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UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO POEMS

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UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO POEMS

By

EDWIN HERBERT LEWIS
PH.D. 1894

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To PRESIDENT HARRY PRATT JUDSON

WHO SUGGESTED ALL THESE TASKS EXCEPT THE FIRST, AND WHOM THE GLEEMAN COULD WISH BETTER REWARDED FOR HIS COURAGE

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INTRODUCTION

These verses were written for occasions, and were inadequate to the occasions. The writer's only consolation is that every new minute is a new occasion and a new opportunity for perfect fitness, and that since the environment is infinite there must be infinite chances of unfitness.

These are university poems, called poems merely because to call them university verses would sound like a play on words. In each case the piece was unwillingly written, not for lack of an impulse but for lack of ability. Their single purpose is like that of music or osmosis—unification.

The studies of a university necessarily separate men and partition the student's mind, but a living unity is to be sought beneath all divisions. The poet admits all convenient distinctions between science and poetry, science and literature, science and religion, art and use, purpose and mechanism, pure research and applied research, but denies any fundamental distinction or unbridgeable chasm. The ultimate realities of science seem to him utterly poetic and inevitably religious. He values nice distinctions in their own place, and sees that no distinction is trivial in science or in art, and yet he cannot forget the university origin of the world "trivial." The present meaning grew up when studies ceased to be humane.

The beginning of the University of Chicago was felt to be a beginning. In that first year everybody knew that each day was a new occasion and the beginning of something. Undergraduates felt an impulse to sing their unity of feeling, and sometimes to sing in serious vein. When the first glee club was about to set forth on their travels, they chose serious

music for their Alma Mater song. They brought it to a graduate student, and he wrote some words for it, little reflecting that the moment for bettering them was already past.

The University celebrated the completion of five years; then of ten years; then of fifteen years. But just before the last-named event the first president of the University died untimely, cut off in the midst of great achievement. The tributes to President Harper were instant, heart-felt, many, and distinguished, but presently the alumni realized that the fifteenth anniversary was at hand and without him. In a sense it was not celebrated but solemnized. At the July convocation, 1906, Hale the Latinist delivered the address. He reviewed the years, he looked ahead, he spoke of "The Continuing City." And after the address came the verses called "Mater Humanissima."

Six years later, in June of 1912, the Harper Memorial Library was to be dedicated. If the day proved to be fair, the exercises of dedication would be held in the open. There would be addresses on every phase of this library, from its architecture to the part it was to play in civilization. The present writer was full of regret that William Vaughn Moody, who had died two years before, could not be the poet who should assist in the dedication. But the event was to occur—and did occur—beneath the blue and open sky, on the surface of a planet not yet united in thought or feeling. Though the present writer was fearful that the successes of the Young Turks would presently precipitate war, he also felt, and the life of President Harper helped him to feel, that through the Word the earth is to become aware of its oneness.

The twenty-fifth anniversary came and was celebrated with great impressiveness. The Great War was meantime

attaining its height, and at the very hour when the convocation procession was forming there came the evil news that the British commander-in-chief had been killed.

Seven years later occurred the retirement of Mr. Martin Antoine Ryerson from the presidency of the board of trustees, and then the retirement of President Harry Pratt Judson from the presidency of the University. The trustees planned a dinner for Mr. Ryerson and a reception for Mr. Judson, and with great difficulty persuaded them to accept these modest honors.

At the Ryerson dinner on January 27, 1923, there would be speeches both grave and gay, and the trustees ventured to have them prefaced by some verses. The gleeman hesitated even more than usual, not quite seeing how a self-effacing subject could be sung.

Yet for thirty years he had heard constant references to "Ryerson," meaning Ryerson Physical Laboratory. And he knew what every Freshman knows, that the thirty years from 1892 to 1922 were exceedingly important in physics. Even before the opening of Ryerson, Michelson had invented the interferometer and used it not merely to measure light and re-measure the meter but to test the velocity of earth on its way through the assumed ether of space. His negative results later led Einstein to query the existence of the ether and to frame the special theory of relativity. And by 1923 the interferometer had been employed to measure, for the first time in the history of the world, various stars. Thus Ryerson had had a hand, as Moody might have put it, "as far as thinking goes out past the stars into unthinkable distance."

Furthermore it had joined in delving "as far as being goes unthinkably, traveling the atom to its fleeing core." In 1895 came the discovery of X-rays by Roentgen, and the

proof by Sir J. J. Thomson that cathode rays consist of negatively charged particles; in 1896 the discovery of radioactivity by Becquerel; in 1898 the discovery of polonium and radium by Mme. Curie. Then followed the measurement of the smallest electric charge by Thomson and his friends in the Cavendish Laboratory, and the more accurate measurement of it by Millikan in Ryerson. Meantime Sir Ernest Rutherford was formulating his theory of the nuclear atom, and presently both physicists and chemists were accepting the electromagnetic theory of the constitution of matter. Laue and the Braggs found a means of securing spectrographs by the diffraction of X-rays in crystal gratings, and Henry Gwyn Jeffreys Moseley applied the method to the elements with very important results.

Such being a few of many important facts and names, the gleeman yielded to his impulse and made some reference to them. He spoke without pretense of authority and without intent of distributing credit with judicial nicety. God help us, who is entitled to credit for anything! He spoke with deep longing for more unity in university work, with faith that science can heal the wounds of science, with the assurance that however technical a matter may be today, tomorrow it will be less technical. Perhaps the time was not yet ripe for the attempt; perhaps the singer was even less ripe than the time; and certainly better poets will find better ways of transmuting science into literature.

ALMA MATER

1894

To-day we gladly sing the praise
  Of her who owns us as her sons;
Our loyal voices let us raise,
  And bless her with our benisons.
Of all fair mothers, fairest she,
  Most wise of all that wisest be,
Most true of all the true, say we,
  Is our dear Alma Mater.

Her mighty learning we would tell,
  Though life is something more than lore;
She could not love her sons so well,
  Loved she not truth and honor more.
We praise her breadth of charity,
  Her faith that truth shall make men free,
That right shall live eternally,
  We praise our Alma Mater.

The City White hath fled the earth,
  But where the azure waters lie,
A nobler city hath its birth,
  The City Gray that ne'er shall die.
For decades and for centuries
  Its battlemented towers shall rise
Beneath the hope-filled western skies—
  'Tis our dear Alma Mater.

MATER HUMANISSIMA

An Ode for the Fifteenth Anniversary, recited at the Fifty-ninth Convocation, June 12, 1906

I

1

But yester-eve here closed the prairie flower
  Whose trivial beauty is forgot today.
The plain has blossomed into hall and tower,
  And viewless dreams are visible in gray.
The granite chapter of romance is told,
  And these enchantments by the morning kissed
    Reveal the theme of all the future tones
And music manifold.
  Last touch of magic, see the tender mist
    Of delicate ivy stealing up the stones.

2

'Tis marvelous—'tis nothing! Evermore
  A rain of falling cities feeds the dust
As plangent showers fed the primal core
  When earth was welded in the whirling gust.
And we, grim nature's fools, ah! why should we,
  Shipwrecked upon a planet veined with fire,
    Build halls for dreaming, cloisters for repose,
And homes for pedantry,
  When every hour of vague and vain desire
    Must be atoned by agonizing throes!

3

Man is a hunted creature—let him hide!
  A pauper—let him earn his crust of bread!
Why in the tombs of thought should he abide,
  To feed ignobly on the powerless dead?
See on the wall the wind-swayed ivy leaf;
  Will brave men pause to name its useless parts,
    And listen not to what the wind doth bear—
The sobs of human grief,
  The noise of battle and the knell of hearts,
    And all the frustrate world's unanswered prayer?

4

Wild words! Forgive them, O belov'd and just,
  Great Alma Mater, whose commandments are:
"Though life be but a gleam and man be dust,
  "Make the dust sacred! make the gleam a star!"
Laughter or tears—which better serves the whole?
  Thou answerest: "Neither! but to re-attain
    "Hellenic measure and Hebraic might,
"And to possess thy soul.
  "The adamantine ether is humane—
    "Its calm is energy, its thrill is light."

5

Such was the oracle that made us thine
  Three lustrums since—or was it yesterday
That first we stood before this western shrine,
  A band of palmers in a morning gray?
But ah! the times are noisy, and too soon
  The clearest accents of that voice were lost,
    Amid the foam of words on every side.
The disillusioned moon
  Looks down upon a surging century, tost
    By lawless pleasure and fanatic pride.

II

1

What wonder then if many a starving fool
  Has fed himself upon the root insane,
And counts the world a scene of wild misrule,
  And raves that all ideals are idols vain!
He reads no splendor in the emblazoned skies,
  No meaning in the whisper of the sea,
    No homeward motion in the flux and flood.
For him no sweet surprise
  Of common goodness proves the mystery
    That God may tent himself in flesh and blood.

2

Forgive us if we sadden when we trace
  The steely gossamers of the loom of law,
Which strongly hold the filmy world in place
  And flash it through with miracle and awe.
We learned from thee to reverence the loom,
  And all the tissue of the golden weft,
    But oft the patterns seem to reel and swim,
And each design is doom.
  What miracle in all the world is left
    If God himself is but a pattern dim?

3

Unveil thy cunning, wisest of the wise,
  Renew thy magic for thy doubting ones,
For thou art watcher of the woven skies,
  And measurest the motions of the suns.
Say what more subtle instrument can write
  A single micron of immortal worth
    When it records the waves of human hope?
What iris bar of light
  Can measure values as it measures earth,
    Or show the goal to which our spirits grope?

4

Thou answerest not in words, but silently
  Thou lookest down with sweet and serious gaze,
And in thy human look we seem to see
  The patient answer to the cry we raise.
"Ye prate of patterns and the web of doom.
  "Is God then strangled in the warp and woof?
    "Is not the Weaver in the Weaver's place?
"Go seat you at the loom!
  "Create the goodness that is heaven's proof,
    "And work with God, if ye would see his face!"

5

Such is the answer that we seem to read
  In thy deep eyes. The years which are to be
Shall better frame the question to the need,
  When wiser sons and daughters ask of thee.
Perchance the atom's flower may release
  Some Ariel, some valency divine,
    Some bond between our life's atomic rout
And God's eternal peace.
  Whate'er the vision, may no child of thine
    Be homeless in the alien vast of doubt.

III

1

Home to the sober gladness of this day
  We throng, thine eldest children, mother fair.
Few wreaths we bring thee of the victor's bay,
  But amaranths of gratitude we bear.
See where thy dawn of wonder opens wide,
  Colored with life! nor fear the sky of rose
    Which blossoms from the white sun of the truth.
Lift up thy head with pride!
  Behold thy radiant unborn host which goes
    Chanting the glory of thine endless youth.

2

The chant assumes a messianic range,
  And sings the newer race which is to be.
The planet's tragic eons, change on change,
  Become the intervals of melody.
Rich as a mother's love the music rings,
  Real as hope, and sweet with all surprise.
    Hark how the laws of heaven blend
With laws of common things!
  For every science fearlessly supplies
    Harmonic means to each humanest end.

3

From yon clear day-spring may the breath and breeze
  Freshen thy brow and sing throughout thy blood.
May all thy studies be humanities,
  And luminous thy goal, the common good.
Dream on of Athens, white beside the sea,
  And grave Judea, lit with whiter stars.
    Pursue through all the arteries of earth
The inviolate mystery.
  'Tis truth, strange common tool, which still unbars
    Eternal values and immortal worth.

4

Immortal! word that quickens mortal breath!
  It names him whom our hearts remember still,
Our man of deeds, our father young in death,
  Master at last of even his mighty will.
Fret not thy weary gaze beyond its power
  To pierce the empyrean of his change.
    Common as life is that celestial birth,
Mysterious as a flower.
  Incredible is heaven, yet not so strange
    As heavenly thoughts in men that walk the earth.

5

Hebraic-minded in Teutonic frame,
  Great toiler, builder great, and greater friend,
Creative hope, aspiring like a flame,
  Wielder of power to power's most noble end,
Live! live in us, brave spirit, teaching still
  The broader vision and the braver act.
    And in that valley of the staff and rod,
Teach us the hero's will,
  Who smiles from lips by human anguish racked,
    And dies firm-trusting in a human God.

THE HOUSE OF THE WORD

An Ode recited at the dedication of
The William Rainey Harper Memorial Library
June 11, 1912

I

Awake, O harp and lute, the Psalmist cried,
In days when all were singers, and God stood
Daily in sudden sunrise to receive
The upward incense of men's lyric prayer,
Sweeter than grapeflowers, in Jerusalem.
Awake, cittern of gold, the Theban cried,
Proud that he shared it with divinities,
The muses violet-crowned, and with their king,
Apollo, worshiped in the Pythian glen
With lyric laughter and white whirling limbs.
But wake not, harp and lute and cithara,
To find your masters gone, and e'en the quill
Which plucked out music, sharpened to a pen
To blacken pages through a thousand years,
And tossed aside for strange machinery.
Least of the balladists, here let me take
Some rude thing like the homely dulcimore
Struck by the Tennessean mountaineer
High in his lonely hills, when the strong thought
Of things forgotten touches him to song,
And like him slowly beat out memories.

II

Among thy children, Mother most humane,
Are voices with young magic in their tones,

But youth unsaddened is unconsonant
To sing of scholars dead among their books,
And poets, young and old, the soon forgot.
Ah, one there was, our lauriger, for whom
The harp of Aeschylus rang unafraid
In times of hesitation; one in whom
Deucalion's stone men, groping, found a voice.
That one there was, who might have builded here
A front of song, memorial, stately, grave,
Such fame as Pindar for Agesias
Reared in Olympia. But him the breeze
Impassioned holds, a region breath, a faint
Diffusèd splendor of Promethean fire
Struck from the fennel on its way to earth.
Seek till ye find it, poets of the morn,
And breathing him, sing out your music free!
So shall ye dwell upon the lips of men
And live forever in the sounding air!

III

'Tis a vast room. Methinks a smaller place
Would lightly hold the great dead of the world,
Shrunken to books. This is the coral isle
Where every futile polyp leaves his bones,
Infinitesimals of permanence.
Here lie the chroniclers of trivial deeds,
And census-takers of defeated hosts,
And registrars of ragged heraldries.
These are the catacombs of tiresome saints,
Bad poets, wrong concluders, pedant scribes.
Philosophers are here, Icarian wings
That caught the iris of the upper air
And fell derided. Nay, but they who laughed—
The careful souls, the patient men of fact,

The cautious heroes of hypothesis—
Are folioed and forgot. Beside them, heaps
Of ashes from the beacon fires of hope,
And all dead-letters back to Amraphel.
Laws better never writ, but for the word
Ironic Ammon spoke to learned Thoth,
That letters dull the edge of memory,
And written evil is a lesser curse.
What might that god have uttered had he lived
To see the cloistered pale calligrapher
Wasting the sunshine of the Middle Age
To paint initials? "Thoth is still the god
"Of this their Christian bibliolatry.
"For him they interlace these golden vines,
"Burnishing or and azure, and for him
"They rubrish breviaries which shall lie
"In some high hall with books of vanished hours,
"Unchanted psalters, missals clasped for aye."

IV

Yet still we read; still strain to focus here
Eyes that were made to look with silent joy
On the clean page of sky or sea or plain,
The unwrit future and the unnamed God.
No words unpack the heart. No words describe
The light of evening on a little face,
The breaker ere it falls, the ethereal cry
The white-throat left unfinished when he passed,
Questioning hearts in May. No words can save,
Yet here are billions, hard words every one.
Can these blind ciphers spell out life, or lend
Wholeness of meaning to a tattered past
Of dim lost Babylonian episodes?

Ask Babylon for bread, she only gives
A wordy stone. Ask Egypt, and she sends
What rushy marrow could escape the jaws
Of hunger building Khafra's house of books.
Ask Pergamum, she tosses the flayed skin
Of victims offered to Asklepios
Cozening the sick. And ye who grant today
This stone pavilion and these heavy towers
Of Babel or funereal silence, these—
Twinned like the broken shrines of Halebid
Above dead gods in pestilent Mysore—
Why would ye pinnacle a roof eterne
Above the book and volume of this death ?

V

His name is here, you answer. Even now
The long light finds it on the scriptured wall
While June is whispering a requiem
Beneath the oak trees. Ah, she wonders there
That brows should be so pale beneath the locks
Death could not silver. But his heart is here!
No box of bronze, no precious relic-case
Can hold the heart of him in little room.
This is his reliquary, this, too small.
If here we house but dust, then here he lies
Splendid in still companionship of dust.
As in Sheol the glimmering kings of eld
Rose to receive their peer when he stood there
Become as one of them, and he lay down
Companioned largely in that oldest gloom,
A king with kings, weak silence crowning all,
So rests he with the best we had, the kings
Whose pale sway holds us when we know it not.

VI

He gleams in shadowy gold, impersonal,
A sculptured name. And shall no more be said?
Shall one man make the choice of Hercules
To dare all hardness so he may but serve,
And grimly crush the stubborn years to months
In agony of effort, till at last,
Losing his life to gain it, on he sweeps
Like some great eponym and word of power—
Shall he do this unsung? What is the peace
He sleeps in but the fellowship of thought?
And what the undivided power of his life
But the sweet burden of the reasoned word,
Born of no single self, but like the light
Into life trembling through the pulse of all?
What else but that shall whiten the red page
Of time's ensanguined book? Oh, wouldst thou sing
The man himself, the great soul of this house,
Impersonal with love of persons, sing—the Word!

VII

Soft and more softly, homely dulcimore,
Lest, shrilling in this presence, we affront
The high still courtesy of royal souls
Whose greatness bides command. This is the place,
The house of miracle, where waiting life,
Chaliced for ages like Gennaro's blood,
Warms and is quickened. Lo, great Uriel
Whispers the morn to service on the earth,
As if he gathered from the world of light,
Beyond the light-years and mortality,
Parental souls like sunbeams, bidding them
Find a new hearthstone in their children's eyes.
Open the books! What, is the world so young!

O race of scholars who laid down your lives
With calm faith—deeper than the deepest creed—
That naught is trivial; ye who would not write
From memory alone one fair tyrannic *yod;*
And ye who struck a haughty planet down
From midmost grandeur to a whirling point,
But in the atom's heart, a radiant world,
Found out rich emperies of littleness;
And all ye closèd eyes which knew to scan
The eoliths and dawnstones of the world,
Lo, this is dawn!

VIII

Up from the dens of earth,
Out from the dark Hercynian forests, down
From sparse Iranian pastures come the hosts,
Driven by hunger into fellowship,
Driven by thirst to far-found wells of strife
In Kadesh, and strange covenants of blood;
Driven by God to interchange of gods
And slow unwilling love of alien shrines.
Warring or wandering, they bring—the Word.
Hark in the dawn the message weakly sent
By wandering caravan and kafila
When God upbringeth Syria out of Kir,
Philistia out of Caphtor, Israel
Out of Mizraim into Midian.
In vain Urusalim sends forth her shards
Quick-burned, to Egypt, crying for relief
Against such blood-stained messengers of peace.
O fellowship of thought, immortal Word,
Across the flood, with some Aegean star
For guide and bashi through the friendly night,
The ships of Tarshish were thy caravan,
Bringing spread silver and smooth ivory

Past white Minoa, wondering what strange speech
Built up those palaces, and speaking fair
With kindly western words the passing prows.
But they, borne westward by red Tyrian sails
With Memphian wheat and linen, carry too
Light byblus and the Memphian oracles,
Beyond Gortyna to the Cyclades.

IX

O fellowship of thought, immortal Word,
What brothers' voices longingly arise
To frame thy mystery! In Ephesus,
Where rivers bring the fierce barbarians down
To learn that laws are many, and to wish
That none may bind them when the hot blood burns,
Young Heraclitus sees the changing word
Flow by him fiery, saddening his youth.
In Athens, where the laughing waters break
Against the marble, Plato stands. He smiles,
With patient care dividing the swift mind,
And from the hot disputes of wordy boys
Lifts the pure fire. It burns Promethean,
Spreading above them in white heavenly shapes
That pattern justice and the city of God.
By Nile wan priests ascetic, listening
To thrice-great Hermes, lord of words confused,
And wondering whither leads that shepherd's voice,
But fearing Greeks who lightly name the name
And have no magic. In Arabia
Beside his tent gray Yusuf, marveling
How word of promise should restrain his hand
Against who sleeps within, the murderer
Of Yusuf's only son. And then at last
Look where a beam strikes back to Ephesus!

John stands where Heraclitus stood, with sweet
Grave eyes uplifted, asking all,
What of the Logos split and parceled now
Throughout the world! If God himself should speak,
Coming with water and blood to interblend
The Reason and the Vow, what would He say?
Would He unlock the magic of the skies
With potent numbers, words omnipotent?
Would He upraise our homely fellowship
Above the need of fellowship, and touch
The general tongue to high seraphic power?
Nay, heaven is homely. Hear the Living Word!
A woman grieving for a vanished friend
In a gray garden saw the gardener.
He asked her why she wept, and she but wailed,
"If thou hast borne him hence, tell me the place
And I will take him." Then God slowly turned.
"Mary!" he said. But she, "Rabboni—!"

X

O fellowship of thought, immortal Word,
Creator in us of the glory named,
Controller in us of the nameless dark!
God is not fearful, and he ever dies
To live again on lips that know him not,
Gladly denied to do great justice here
To whom he loves. The dawn is crimson yet,
Reflecting battle-blood. But still the Word
With sweet new accents whitens round the world,
Sphering all souls in one. Beyond the rune,
Beyond the hieratic syllable,
Reckoned in numbers which the comets fear,
Infinite, secular, it flashes on,
Bowing the heavens o'er a common hearth.

Promise of God, deign to be spoken here!
Here where the coral isle advances high
With labors well forgot, and happy bones
Limed in the sure foundations. Here at last
Where all the nations send their hostages
While the one morning lightens over all—
Temple and tenement and ivied tower—
Here where the varying tongues of brotherhood
Seek for the great parole, the Word of Peace!

THE BALLAD OF RYERSON

Recited at the dinner given to Martin Antoine Ryerson by his fellow Trustees of the University, January 27, 1923

1

A thousand summers ago, for the summers go by in dreams,
The fiords beside the swan-road were the richest of earthly streams.
For they let in the frightened herring whom the finner-whales pursue,
And there for a silvery moment they guarded them in the blue
Till the men of the reyr, the village, caught sight of the rippling fins
And sprang to the oars and bent the ash to the creak of the tholing-pins,
And lifted the living lightning, the silver in the net,
Toiling with anxious faces and salting the sea with sweat.
But when the day was over and the catch was safely home,
Garnered like barley for winter in foam-floaters over the foam,
The reyr swarmed to the mead-hall and asked for a song again,
And the gleeman struck the gleewood, singing of gods and men.

2

He sang of the heavenly hammer, of Thor whom the giants fear,
For he struck them down of a sudden like the flash of a herring spear.

But one of them laughed at his lightning, the midgard serpent hoar
That girdles the earth to hold it, thralling the Thulian shore,
Rounding the dim horizon while the white moons wax and wane,
Like a rich ring wrought in the fire, that the ring-giver gives to his thane.
But once in the hall of giants, where nothing is what it seems,
And all is dark as the mirk-wood where mistletoe softly gleams,
Being challenged to lift a kitten, he struggled with fearful strength,
Wrested one foot from the floor and arched her velvet length,
Not knowing he stretched the serpent that round the earth is curled,
And almost split the horizon, and almost spilled the world.

3

The Norsemen laughed in the mead-hall, the fishermen where they sat,
And swore it was no great wonder that a fish should hide in a cat.
But the singer who shaped the story of that strife with desperate odds
Smiled and was silent and marveled at the lack of wit in gods.
If Thor had but stroked the kitten in jötunheim dark and dim,
His own fire would have sparkled out along the ocean's rim.
For all things were likest to lightning unto the gleeman's eye—
The flash of fish in the water, the flash of wings in the sky,
The flash of the sword in battle, the glint and glitter of death,

And Brynhild's glance and Gudrun's arms and Balder's dying breath,
Mistletoe in the winter, white violets in the spring,
They all were Thor in hiding, but this he dared not sing.

4

The years went by in glimmers, the singer was cairn-dust now,
The thorn that slew bright Balder shone out on Jesus' brow.
But the sword bit harder than ever and plucked at the richest brain,
Sent heroes home on the night-wind, the host of the wrongfully slain.
It sought out the perfect Sigurds, it touched them swift and sure,
It made Valhalla richer and left the wide world poor.
The Reyr pondered the sword-curse, the brand once hid in the oak,
And gat them forth on the swan-road and lived with the Holland folk.
And here they shrank to a handful in fighting the curse that was Spain,
Till the root of their tree was riven, and the swan of their crest was fain
For the quiet of western waters. Again they took to the flood,
Ryersons under the welkin, weary of shedding blood.

5

The years go by in glimmers, and I hear a pleasant croon.
The Ryerson sword is rounded, and spins like a merry moon,
Biting the oak and the pine-tree, for there was no time for stone,
To house the host of the harried who came at last to their own.

With the sweet French girl beside him one gazed and boded
no good,
For he knew how the flame will follow the resin it loved in
the wood.
And the first who came were freemen and counted the cost
of things,
But after them rolled a rabble, the leavings of war and
kings.
Now why in God's name should they come, and why should
the rails run in
From the lands that paid for Caesar with hunger and hate
and sin,
With inches shorn from their stature, with brain-pans reaved
and bereft?
Ah, they knew far better than we knew that little of earth
is left.

6

God, how they swarmed the rim of the lake with little
of law
And made them pitchy barracks for the fire-drake's waiting
maw!
And the fire-drake came for his own. He came for the lost
sunshine
Hidden by Balder's summers in the secret shadowy pine.
He peered within the chambers where once the sap had
welled,
And found them lying empty, their raftered grace upheld
By walls of amber atoms, each haloed like a saint
And shutting in its fire with hyaline restraint.
No heart of an atom he touched, but from every atom he tore
The wreath of its righteous wrath, and all that wrath he wore
As he sate him down to feast on a thousand summers of light
Stored in a thousand homes to be lost in a single night.

7

But they laughed when the feast was over, and molded the earth again,
And wrought them a lasting city on the world-inviting plain.
They wrought it with buried sunlight, black fern and the irised oil,
Thralls disenthralled they wrought it, with grace and glory of toil.
But what of the day when the planet is full and the breeding constrained ?
When the last black fern is a ghost and the last of the coral drained ?
Will the sword bite harder than ever ? Will the grace and glory be done ?
These grave gray halls are the query, and the gravest is Ryerson.
For the man is become a tower, though he labored for you and me
With the heart of a man and the brain of a man and grave sweet courtesy.
More greatly is he builded than the towers of Asgard town,
For beyond the twilight of the gods Ryerson looketh down.

8

Rude is the minstrel's measure, and rudely he plucks the strings,
But in Ryerson rainbows murmur the music of heavenly things.
Is not this stranger than heaven that a man should hear around
The whole of earth and the half of heaven and see the shadow of sound ?
He gathereth up the iris from the plunging planet's rim
With bright precision of fingers that Uriel envies him.

But when from the plunging planet he spread out a hand to feel
How fast the ether drifted back through flesh or stone or steel,
The fine fiducial fingers felt no ethereal breath.
They penciled the night in a cross of light and found it still as death.
Have the stars conspired against him? Do measurements only seem?
Are time and space but shadows enmeshed in a private dream?

9

But dreaming or not, he measured. He made him a rainbow bar,
And first he measured the measures of man, and then he measured a star.
Now tell us how long is the metre, lest fire should steal it away?
Ye shall fashion it new, immortal, of the crimson cadmium ray.
Now tell us how big is Antares, a spear-point in the night?
Four hundred million miles across a single point of light.
He has taught a world to measure. They read the furnace and gauge
By the lines of the fringe of glory that knows nor aging nor age.
Now this is the law of Ryerson and this is the price of peace—
That men shall learn to measure or ever their strife shall cease.
They shall measure the cost of killing, and measure the hearts that bleed,
And measure the earth for sowing, and measure the sowing of seed.

10

When Ryerson rose like a dream, none dreamed of the lightning massed
In the welded heart of an atom. None saw the shadow cast
By the light more thrilling than light, the unseen searing wave
That searches a man and foreshadows the man he will be in his grave.
These fresh-hewn walls were ivied or ever that sight was borne,
And the atom lay like a jewel unbroken and unworn.
Light it lay in the beryl and light in the berylline seas,
Its cloistered charges balanced, and dim as the Hyades.
The thunderbolts were imprisoned in crucibled crystalline ore,
And locked in the laughing ocean, and shut in the shining shore,
And lulled in the light of evening, and hushed in gentle grain
And unimperiled lilies impearled with quiet rain.

11

A world of woven lightning, incredible, unguessed,
Where we saw an Easter lily, and Raphael saw the rest.
He saw within the lily-cells his own seraphic sky,
And smelled the breath of asphodels, and felt them passing by
On suns and clustered planets building the fragrant flower.
And so with all the fragrant earth, save when with heavenly power
God loosed the bands of an atom and bade its fires recede
Into the treasure-house of lead against the day of need.
Now God be thanked for the graciousness that gave us Ryerson,
And the day that was near to dawning, and the rainbow's task begun,

And the parallels delved by the diamond, ready to do their part
And shrink to a crystal lattice to read the atom's heart.

12

"It is time," said God. Then Raphael lifted a lily of fire,
Hurtling the hope of a hearth when the hearths of earth expire,
And came unto a woman, and said, "Be not afraid,
"Though your woman's hand be blanched and burned by the sun-grain cannonade."
And she who received the lily is called the brave Marie,
And all the wide world wondered at that epiphany.
Now who shall measure the sun-grain in the miracle God has wrought?
Lo, Paris and Cambridge and Ryerson were needed to make one thought
Till on the final droplet-star, the massiest tiniest sphere,
The moon-grain lingered a moment and told the secret here.
Now take the charge and the crystal! Young heroes, unlock the lead,
And kindle a rose for mother ere the rose of her hearth be dead!

13

O planet ridged with Calvaries and rimmed with Suvla Bays,
Not all your nights are veined with fire, not all of your lightning slays—
Then why have you slain your darlings? And why did your heart disclose
Fury and flame and the flash of lead when your dearest brought you a rose?
Ah, the rose! The expectancy and the rose!
The beat of the harp is broken, the heart of the gleeman is fain

To call him back from the grave and rebuild the shattered brain
Of Moseley dead in the trenches, Harry Moseley dead by the sea,
Balder slain by the blind man there in Gallipoli.
No longer the towers of Oxford whisper the middle age,
But the dearest of hopes destroyed and the great unwritten page.
No longer the Trinity meadows bloom as in other days,
But the sunlight dreams of violets beyond the violet rays.

14

Beyond the violet seek him, for there in the dark he dwells,
Holding the crystal lattice to cast the shadow that tells
How the heart of the atom thickens, ready to burst into flower,
Loosing the bands of Orion with heavenly heat and power.
He numbers the charge on the center for each of the elements
That we named for gods and demons, colors and tastes and scents,
And he hears the hum of the lead that burned through his brain like fire
Change to the hum of an engine, the song of the sun-grain choir,
As it spins the chaliced lightning to banish shadow and shade,
Or drives the heavy hammers by the sun-grain cannonade,
Or weaves the wings of the humming-birds that flash through heaven afar,
Or grinds the golden barley by the voltage of a star.

15

Now if they slay the dreamers and the riches the dreamers gave,
They shall get them back to the benches and be as the galley slave.

But if they be wise to measure the star beneath their feet,
Intense with tissue of power and woven with waiting heat,
There are starry uses of stars. Let them love their planet and see
How it longeth to bear the burden and let the slave go free.
They shall loose the lightning gently, the granite shall bloom with grain,
And under the rainbow glory young Eden shall come again.
Rude is the minstrel's measure, forgetting how he began,
And singing the princely mead-hall but not the prince of a man.
But one is the heart of brothers, and the brain of brothers is one.
Who taught me to sing of the others? Why, who but Ryerson.

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